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AMERICAN VAMPIRE

S E C O N D
C Y C L E

5 Nov '14
suggested for
mature readers
vertigocomics.com



The Miner's Journal

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Letters Steve Wands
Assistant Editor Sara Miller
Editor Mark Doyle
Cover By Rafael Albuquerque
American Vampire
Created By
Snyder & Albuquerque

Nevada Desert. 1954.



JUST PAPER AND DIRTY LEATHER. FIFTY PAGES OF PRESSED LINEN, NOT EVEN WOOD PULP, BUT LINEN, NEARLY A HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS OLD.

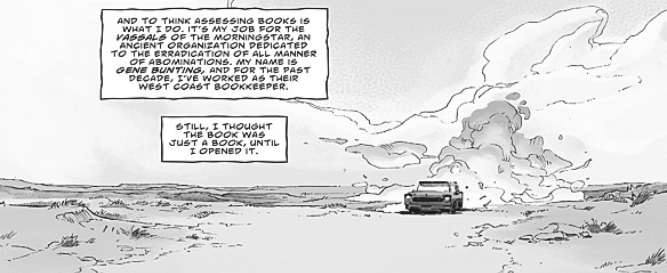
THE TRUTH IS, I DIDN'T THINK MUCH OF IT, WHEN I DISCOVERED IT ON OUR SHELVES.



IF I'D ONLY KNOWN WHERE IT WOULD LEAD ME...

AND TO THINK ASSESSING BOOKS IS WHAT I DO. IT'S MY JOB FOR THE VASSALS OF THE MORNINGSTAR, AN ANCIENT ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO THE ERRADICATION OF ALL MANNER OF ABOMINATIONS. MY NAME IS GENE BUNTING, AND FOR THE PAST DECADE, I'VE WORKED AS THEIR WEST COAST BOOKKEEPER.

STILL, I THOUGHT THE BOOK WAS JUST A BOOK, UNTIL I OPENED IT.









ROYAL
FORKES.

WELL, I DID HEAR OF A CLAIM
BY A SIMILAR NAME THAT WAS
LAID FARTHER SOUTH OF
HERE, ALONG THE RED
GUM CREEK.

CAN I
FOLLOW THE
CREEK?

SURE,
ONLY IT'S
NOT A
CREEK.

IT'S A DRY
GUTTER, CUT
BY FLOODS IN
WINTER.

YOU'LL SEE
IT TO THE SIDE OF
ROUTE TWO, ABOUT
SIX MILES IN, LIKE A
SAW CUT.

FOLLOW IT
TIL IT SPLITS.
HEARD TELL THAT
CLAIM LAY AT
THE SPLIT.



GUTTER
TO THE SPLIT.
THANK YOU
KINDLY,
MA'AM.



HEY! YOU
KNOW THAT WHOLE
BITCH WENT BELLY UP
IN LESS THAN A YEAR!
NOTHING GAINED. WHAT THE HELL
YOU WANT WITH AN OLD
CLAIM LIKE THAT
ANYHOW...

May 19th, 1850

I was looking for quartz when Seb hurried over with a page torn out the newspaper. It was an advertisement and he was pushing it at me, panting, flushed with excitement.

"Take a look," he said, handing me the page, wet from his hand. I was hot and tired from wet panning all day. There was no shade along the Sacramento, but here was Seb, pushing a page of the Californian at me.

"Take a look at what?" I said. The company was called Royal Forkes and I'd never heard of it. It had an insignia like hair standing on end.

I saw nothing special in it and I told Seb so.



my pal Seb

"What are you, sun blind?" he said. He pointed to a spot on the advertisement I could barely read, as the sweat from his thumb had corrupted it. I looked closely and saw that it was the promise of a dollar a week pay.

I held the page out to him. "No one pays that," I said. "It's a trick."

"It's British coal, Dodger," he said. Dodgerman was my surname. Sebberton his. "British coal treats their people right. My father told me, if I ever got a chance to try British, I should. I'm telling you."

Your father never mined a day in his life," I said. Seb took the advertisement back. "Look," he said. "We need to throw in with this, t-tell, there's nothing for us here anyway."

I looked at the empty pan in my hands and then at Seb. He was my oldest friend. We'd met in a schoolhouse in St.

Louis at nine years old, nearly ten years ago. He wanted to be a writer for the papers. Me, I wanted to be an illustrator. Our fathers were both tannery men and wanted us with them. Demanded it. But instead we'd set off together when the boom had begun, two young men defying their fathers, off to find our fortune. Now here we were, in the mountains of California, no money, no prospects...

And so today we are on our way south to Nevada. We've spent every last cent on a coach down. The wheels are missing spokes and the fellow driving us looks like he will kill us in our sleep, but Seb is smiling from ear to ear.

Looking at him, I cannot help but be optimistic about what we might find.

CALIFORNIAN



WEALTH TO BE HAD!
Gentlemen of fortitude, a new endeavor is being undertaken by the Royal Forkes Mining Enterprise! One of the oldest mining companies in the world. The proprietors of Royal Forkes are confident the area along Red Gum Creek in southern Nevada to be rich in mineral wealth! We are looking for a few intrepid men, who scientific capitalists, to aid us in the extraction of precious metals! Men of God, we will pay a dollar a week!

THE BOOK MADE A
LONG JOURNEY
BEFORE COMING INTO
MY POSSESSION.

IT'S BELIEVED THAT HARRY
HOUDINI ACQUIRED IT IN HIS
LATER TRAVELS, DEBUNKING
SPIRITUALISTS ACROSS
AMERICA. FOR A LONG TIME IT
WAS SHELVED IN HIS PRIVATE
COLLECTION, A LIBRARY OF
THE OCCULT, AS "AN OBJECT
FOR FURTHER STUDY."

UPON HIS DEATH, THE
BOOK PASSED HANDS,
UNTIL IT ENDED UP IN
THE STUDY OF HOWARD
PHILLIPS LOVECRAFT.

A FRIEND OF THE
VASSALS, HOWARD
DONATED THE BOOK TO
US IN HIS LAST DAYS.

SINCE I DISCOVERED THE
BOOK, I HAVEN'T KNOWN
WHOM TO TRUST.



...
AND
THE CREEK
SPLITS.



ALL RIGHT,
ROYAL FORKES.
LET'S DO
YOU UP.

We arrived at the
Royal Forkes. . .



June 20th, 1850



The Royal Forks camp

We arrived at the Royal Forks camp today, and I will say that the site is not what I expected.

It was early morning when we approached the camp. The odd thing was, after traveling nearly five hundred miles with us, our horses gave out not five miles from the camp. It was peculiar to be sure.

We were traveling lightly across the cracked, bright dirt, so close to camp we could almost see it, and suddenly the animals simply stopped. Mine halted first. It happened so abruptly I nearly fell. The beast froze, and, for a moment, touched its knees to the dirt, as though in protest. Seb's animal planted its feet as well.

After such a long journey, Seb and I were so glad to be near the site that we found the whole incident wildly humorous. Our horses giving out here, so close to our destination. We gave them water and tried to coax them, but they would not move. We were laughing, pulling on them, when we heard a voice behind us.

"Sir," said the voice.

We turned to find a man standing along the creek. He was dressed as a gentleman, in vest, and he was strikingly handsome. He could not have looked more out of place in the Nevada desert.

His accent was evident. British, and Seb elbowed me in the ribs at the sound of it. "British coal" ... he mouthed.

"My name is Joseph Pell," said the man, touching his own vest. "And as the assistant foreman of the Royal Forks site, it's my honor and pleasure to welcome you both to camp. The site is just this way. Can I take anything for you?"

Seb and I exchanged a glance. What a voice. Like something forged from silver by the queen's metallurgist. He was a gentleman in the desert, asking to carry our bags.

"So kind of you," said Seb. And before I could protest, Seb had handed this man - Pell - his satchel. It was cumbersome, but Pell took it without so much as flinching.

He turned to me. "And yours, sir?" he said.

I wanted to keep it, but his hand was there, waiting, and I surrendered it.

"Let me thank you both for coming, on behalf of our foreman," he said, our bags hanging from his slender shoulders, heavy with equipment. He seemed unbothered. "If you'll follow me. I assure you we'll compensate you for the animals, if they've expired. Set them free, and don't trouble yourselves."

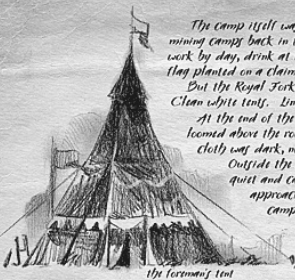
He turned and began walking away. Again Seb and I looked at each other. We had to restrain ourselves from laughing. What an oddity, this man, this desert, this situation...

But we followed him, our horses staying behind, watching us go.



Joseph Pell





the foreman's tent

The camp itself was a surprise for both Seb and myself. We had tried three mining camps back in the Sierras and all were raucous, filthy places. Men would work by day, drink at night, fight, curse, sing, fornicate, kill. . . Every tent its own flag planted on a claim. Little ragged countries, all at war with one another.

But the Royal Forks site it. . . was like nothing either of us had encountered. Clean white tents. Lined up in a row. . . like polished shoes.

At the end of the line of tents was a larger tent, exceedingly large in fact. It loomed above the row, its peak like a steeple poking high above the others. Its cloth was dark, nearly black.

Outside the white row of tents were miners, men like us. Except they were quiet and calm, sitting or standing by the flaps. Each watched our approach in silence, with a kind smile and a nod. I wondered if the camp had religion.

Pell showed us to our tent, which was clean and spacious as the others. Better than anything either of us could have hoped for. After placing our bags inside, Pell reached inside his vest and produced two shiny objects.

The disks sat in his palm, catching the light from outside. "In advance of your good work," he said. Seb took his right away but it took me a moment to understand what it was I was looking at. It was bright and gleaming. A dollar coin. I looked at Pell. He was smiling at me and I was struck again by his handsomeness. "We believe in treating our workers right," he said. "That's what the foreman believes, I should say."

And just then I felt a sudden wave of gratitude rise in me. Towards Seb, for bringing me the advertisement, for this gentleman carrying our bags. I could draw you a sketch of my own heart, swollen. "Please tell the foreman back in jolly old England how much we appreciate it," I said. "If we could take back the revolution, we would." He smiled even more broadly. His eyes were a cloudy blue, nearly white. Pools of water in a desert. "You can thank him yourself sometime," said Pell. "He's staying here. His tent is at the end of the row, see?" I looked through the flaps of our tent at that large black structure in the distance, the top rising above the rest, dark against the sky.

"He's with his wife," said Pell. "She's with child. Not easy out here, as you can imagine. He's a devoted man." I thanked the foreman silently. Pell bid us goodbye and told us to explore the camp, sleep, whatever we wanted to do. I wanted to rest but it was early, and Seb encouraged me to explore the camp with him. We couldn't stop smiling, glancing at each other as we walked the roof of perfect tents. . . Oddly, all the other miners were gone now, presumably having gone inside their tents to rest. It was like Seb and I were the only men around, the whole camp built for us.

We walked past the tents, past the well, the creek, out into the desert, where the beginnings of the shaft itself had been sunk. The others hadn't gotten very far, but even so, the mouth was wide and deep. An impressive start. We were just about to walk back to our tent when Seb took my arm.

"It is a bit strange," he said.

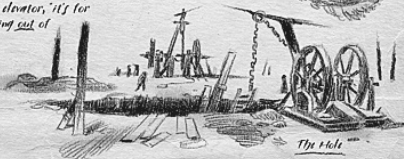
"If it's a dream, don't wake me," I said.

"No," he said, "there's no material for extraction. All this," he said, gesturing to the rigging, the narrow elevator, it's for digging a hole. Not pulling anything out of that hole."

"Like I said, don't wake me."

I tapped his head with my coin.

"If they want us to dig a hole, so be it. We can do it, then we'll be gone with our pay, never to be seen again."



The Hole

WHERE DID IT ALL GO?
IT'S LIKE IT VANISHED
WITH NO TRACE.



EVEN A CLAIM AS LIGHT AS
THIS ONE, THERE SHOULD
BE SOME EVIDENCE. THEY
DUG DEEP, AFTER ALL...



SO WHERE'S
THE HOLE?



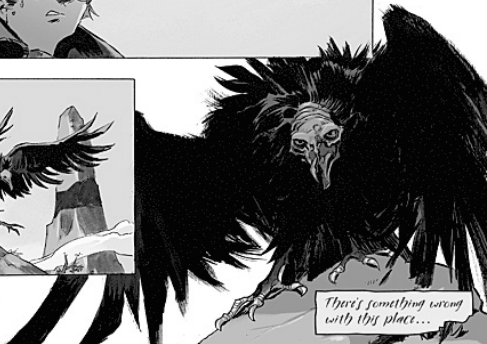
WHAT THE HELL
HAPPENED TO--



SKAM!
SKAM!



There's something wrong
with this place...



July 5th, 1850

There's something wrong with this place... That's what Seb believes. He's become increasingly fearful these past days. As I said, he has been suspicious from the very first day. Lately, though, the things he's imagining... At night he spends hours pecking through the slaps at the foreman's black tent at the end of the row, hoping to catch a glimpse. He was always the more excitable of the two of us, though. Full of wild humor, his father liked to say. I love Seb for it, but his father used to give him soda water to calm him down.

Still, I admit, there is strangeness here. Seb's initial observation about the site was correct. Royal Forks does seem more interested in digging a hole than extracting anything from it. We dig straight down, pressurizing the water, blasting away what we can, then chopping, chopping. We blast now and then. No diagonal shafts, nothing to buttress this one. No exploring. Just straight down. We're getting deep, fast. There are jets of steam in the air already. Black damp. . . A skunk damp.

And yes, a single hole, directly down is odd to be sure, but even so... perhaps there's some other purpose the company wants to keep private. A geological survey is my guess. Something bigger than just mining for wealth. When asked, everyone on site, including Pell, claims the shaft is being sunk to extract precious metal, but I saw what I'm sure was silver the other day, and we kept sinking the hole, right past it. No one seemed to care when I made mention of it.

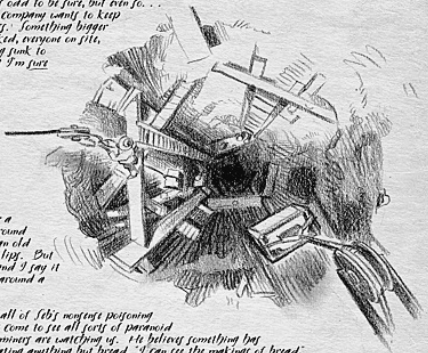
"We'll examine all we've got when we get deep enough, good sir," said Pell. Then he put a hand on my shoulder. It was oddly heavy. "I hear you're an artist. I'd love to see your illustrations some time. You keep them in that book of yours?"

The other day Pell asked them to pour a kind of red dust - like brick dust - around the edge of the hole. He said it was an old trick to add moisture and harden the lips. But it's a trick of which I've never heard, and I say it does look strange, like a ring of blood around a gaping black mouth...

All of this, though, I truly believe it's all of Seb's nonsense poisoning my thoughts. The full truth is, he has come to see all sorts of paranoid nonsense around us. He says the other miners are watching us. He believes something has been done to them so he has stopped eating anything but bread. "I can see the makings of bread," he says. "I see him stare at the mining company symbol sometimes as though he detects evil in it. I keep telling myself it's only a few more weeks, though. At the rate we're digging, the hole will be insupportably deep in a matter of days. And the money... We've made more in a few weeks than we would in a year.

I have the coals stacked next to this journal right now. It's nearly midnight, and their shine in the pale moonlight coming in the slaps... the slaps letting in light because Seb is pecking out again. Staring at the black tent at the end of the row. He is whispering something to himself. I cannot hear what.

I'd lay a hand on him if I didn't think he'd jump.





July 19th, 1850

Seb ran tonight. He just fled, all at once. I tried to dissuade him, but there was no reasoning with him. He was like a man possessed.

His decision to flee was apparently prompted by something he saw moments ago. Over the course of the past few nights, there've been screams from the foreman's tent. His wife, screaming in pain. Of course, we all assumed it was the start of her labor. But the screams went on all night. In the morning, they stopped, only to start again when the sun was down. Yesterday morning, again they halted abruptly. And last night, at almost the instant the sun sank below the horizon, they began again. shrieks, blood-curdling. Every few minutes, one spiraling up into the sky, the pitch growing higher and higher as the night wore on, growing impossibly high, infernally so. Like the scream of a sheep, or a goat being torn apart.

Seb and I lay awake, listening. I was about to talk to him, to see how he was holding up, when he stood, angrily, and stormed off.

"Where are you going?" I said.

"To meet our foreman and his wife, of course" he said, and then he was through the flaps before I could stop him.

"Seb!" I called after him. "Seb, wait!" But he wouldn't hear it. It was so dark that night I lost sight of him before he neared the black tent. But I could see the tent itself, blacker than the night sky, peaking up above us all.

I started out of the tent, but then something seized in me and I stayed put. Why didn't I follow my friend? Was I afraid? I don't know, but I didn't follow him, and moments later, Seb returned and began to pack - frantically.

I asked him what he'd seen but he wouldn't say. He was shaking, his face pale. He seemed to see nothing but his belongings. He'd barely filled his bag when he slung it over his shoulder.

He looked at me.

"I saw him," he said. "The foreman. And the... the wife. We need to leave. Now."

I told him to stop, to talk this through a moment.

But then, before I could say anything more, he was gone. My friend. Vanished into the night. It was only later I noticed he hadn't even taken his coins. He'd left them all in the tent. A small fortune.

I only pray he makes it where he wants to go. I worry he was right. I worry I should run too, before it's too late. I worry one of these times...





*...I'll go down in
that hole, and won't
come back up.*

JUST A LITTLE
FARTHER, GENE...

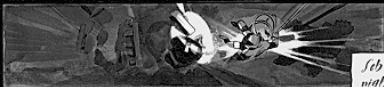
...YOU'RE
ALMOST THERE.

ALL YOUR SUSPICIONS, ALL
THE RESEARCH THESE PAST
WEEKS... HIDDEN FROM THE
OTHERS. ROYAL FORKES, THE
INSIGNIA, HOW IT CONTAINS
THE OLDER AKKADIAN MARK, THE
SEVEN TONGUES, OR "TONGS,"
THE PITCHFORK, THE SPECIES
THE THING MAKES BEFORE
EMERGING...

IT WAS PUT DOWN
HERE, YOU KNOW
IT. BY THE ROYAL
FORKES, JUST
LIKE IT SAYS IN
THE BOOK.

IT'S ALL TRUE.

A LITTLE FARTHER AND YOU'LL PROVE
IT. YOU'LL HAVE ENOUGH TO SHOW
AGENT BOOK, ASSUMING YOU CAN
TRUST HER. YOU CAN, GENE. YOU CAN.
YOU KNOW HER. SHE'S A FRIEND.



*Seb came back two
nights ago...*

July 21

Roscoe's,
our fathers and

Rescoe's, walking down the barrel drains and tannery and finding our fathers and hugging them both. Or maybe he'd make it, maybe he'd make it to New York. Maybe he'd write about me, and I'd live on in his stories. I was thinking these thoughts, half asleep, when he came back. Or when I noticed he was simply there.

I heard a stirring, a rustling sound like dirt scraping, and when I looked, he was lying there in his bed. Like he'd never gone anywhere. His eyes were open, and he was staring at me. He looked filthy, but his expression was calm and peaceful.

"Seb?" I said. "Seb, what happened?"

"Nothing at all, Dodger," he said. He lay there, staring at me, unblinking.

The woman's screams from the tent started again just then. EEEEEEEEEEEUUUUUUUU!!!!!!!

This thing says it's Seb but it's not. It watches me at night.

This morning the Seb thing pissed and shot itself and didn't even move.

It just smiled.

4 24th 1859 I know this will likely be my last entry.
This morning the Seb thing, moments ago, without warning, it got up and walked out of the
was shocked. Why had it left? I noticed then that the foreman's wife - her screams sounded
clearer than usual. They'd become commonplace, like the howling of the wind. I peeked
the tent and what I saw...

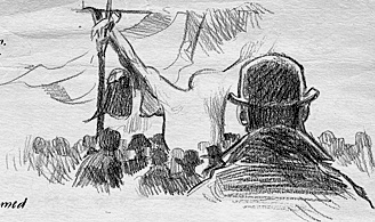
I know this will likely be my last entry.

This morning the Jeb thing, moments ago, without warning, it got up and walked out of the tent. I was shocked. Why had it left? I noticed then that the foreman's wife - her screams sounded louder, closer than usual. They'd become commonplace, like the howling of the wind. I peeked out of the tent and what I saw...

She was not with
child, but with
something else.
stretched to
bursting. . .



She hung from a bed built upside down.
Her cries were terrible, ecstatic, shrieks
of glee for what was coming.
I wanted to scream, to run, but I
stood frozen to the spot.
That's when I saw him. The
foreman himself. . .



He had his back to me, but I knew it
was him. He stood taller than the
other men, looming like his tent had loomed
over the others.

I had a sense that he was very old. Older than this place. Older than the dirt.

I had a sense of something timeless and evil and then he turned to me. . .

I could feel my pulse in my hands, throbbing.

He smiled. A slow smile that stretched too widely across his face.
His whole face seemed a mouth.

And then it was as though the spell was broken and I rushed inside
the tent.

I write this knowing I will not escape.

I will die here.

We have dug a pit.

A Nest for something. I have no heart left. No spirit.

Supplies come in every week, and I will try to hide this journal in the
rigging. It will likely be found and burned. But even so. I will try.
And above all. . .

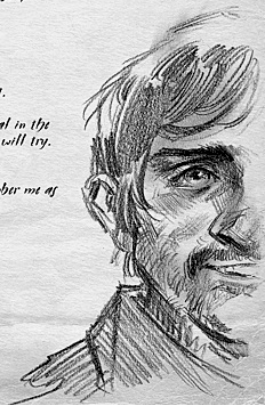
. . . I beg whoever finds it never to come here. And to remember me as
I was, not as I am now, a wasted, haunted shell of myself.

My name was William Dodgeman of Chicago.

This was my face.

This was my face.

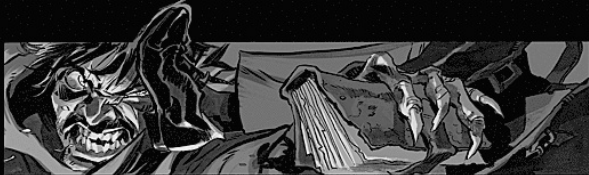
This was my face...











And to remember
me as I was...



as I was...



WOOO!

as I was...



Next:
RED MOON!



Emilio Utrera

VERTIGO QUARTERLY: CMYK PROCESS

The third installment of VERTIGO's new Quarterly Anthology, CMYK is out just in time for fall and appropriately correlates with the color YELLOW! As the leaves change, the sun sinks lower in the sky, the air becomes crisp and there's a sense of rejuvenation, a need to accomplish something, to be somebody. To ride right along that euphoria we have stories that fill you with a passion for life by Toril Orlesky and Fabio Moon. But as bright foliage quickly turns to grey limbs, yellow is the cycle of death as Matt Miner and Taylan Kurtulus portray in their tale.

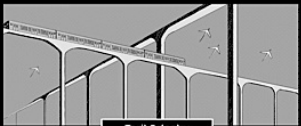
A sickly fear of the inevitable winter freeze is explored by Joao Lemos, and the chill that runs down your spine when unseen feet crunch on a pile of leaves is exploited by Marguerite Bennett and Bill Sienkiewicz. It becomes a time to battle your monsters with Gerard Way and Philip Bond, stand

up to a rival with Steve Orlando and Emilio Utrera, or fight for a cause with Diego Agrimbau and Lucas Varela. Maybe B. Read and Chris Wildgoose will even teach you something new.

Stories about living life and stories about dying. Extreme horror to a dash of humor. The perfect accompaniment to all feelings of fall - from hallows eve to giving thanks, falling leaves and changing lives, time to shake off the malaise of a hot, sticky summer and do something productive. So sit back with your pumpkin latte and enjoy!



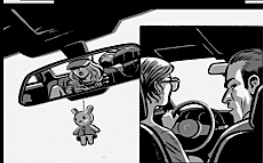
- Sara Miller, Managing Editor



Toril Orlesky



Taylan Kurtulus



Lucas Varela



Bill Sienkiewicz

GRAPHIC CONTENT

LOOK!

A cover has an important mission: to grab your attention and tempt you to turn the page so you can be sucked into a story. Plain and simple.

Since the competition for your precious time and money has never been fiercer, we thought October would be the perfect time to subvert the focus of the Vertigo monthlies: For one month, the story begins on the cover, allowing you instant access to the guts and glory of our interior, sequential pages. Word balloons, internal narration, sound effects – nothing hidden, obfuscation be damned.

You'll like what you get at a glance: an unexpected approach to our cover image that presents a united front of original stories with gravitas and damaged characters with heart and verve. Or, if you'd prefer, it's Vertigo's COVER STORY.

Shelly

– Shelly Bond, Executive Editor



DEFY COVERS

October 2014

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